

Message Text

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AMCONSUL BORDEAUX
AMCONSUL LYON
AMCONSUL NICE
AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, FR, US
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH GASTON DEFFERRE

SUMMARY. DURING OUR EXTREMELY CORDIAL MEETING DEFFERRE CONFIDENTLY DESCRIBED FRANCE'S FUTURE UNDER A LEFT GOVERNMENT, CRITICIZED GISCARD'S INDECISIVENESS, PREDICTED THAT THE PRESIDENT WILL CONTINUE TO HAVE DIFFICULTIES WITH CHIRAC AND THE RPR, AND THOUGHT THE BARRE PLAN WILL NOT SUCCEED. DEFFERRE PREDICTED THAT A LEFT VICTORY IN FRANCE WILL BRING AN "EXPLOSION," TRANSFORMING THE POLITICAL CLIMATE, BUT SAID THAT THE LEFT WILL NOT DEMAND THAT PRESIDENT GISCARD STEP DOWN. THE DEPUTY/MAYOR WAS PARTICULARLY IMPRESSED BY THE COOPERATIVE SPIRIT OF THE FORD/CARTER TRANSITION, AND STRESSED THAT A LEFT GOVERNMENT IN FRANCE WOULD MEAN NO CHANGE IN FRENCH FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION WITH THE UNITED STATES. END SUMMARY.

1. BACKGROUND. I PAID AN OFFICIAL CALL DECEMBER 16 ON
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THE MAYOR OF MARSEILLE, SOCIALIST DEPUTY GASTON DEFFERRE, ACCCOMPANIED BY CONSUL GENERAL SIMPSON AND MY EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT. I HAD MET DEFFERRE WHILE ON A PRIVATE VISIT TO MARSEILLE TWO YEARS AGO. LATER I TWICE HAD TO POSTPONE OFFICIAL VISITS, FIRST BECAUSE OF THE RAMBOUILLET SUMMIT AND SECOND BECAUSE OF DEFFERRE'S

INTEMPERATE PUBLIC REMARKS LAST SPRING JUST BEFORE THE CANTONAL ELECTIONS, FOLLOWING OUR POLICY STATEMENTS ON THE ISSUE OF COMMUNISTS IN WESTERN EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS. DURING MY OFFICIAL VISIT TO MARSEILLE LAST OCTOBER, DEFFERRE WAS IN ISRAEL WITH FRANCOIS MITTERRAND, AND I WAS UNABLE TO EXTEND MY STAY UNTIL HE RETURNED. I HAD THUS SOUGHT THIS MEETING TO SMOOTH AWAY ANY PAST RECRIMINATIONS, AND TRAVELED TO MARSEILLE EXPRESSLY FOR THIS PURPOSE.

2. PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING. DEFFERRE COMMENTED THAT GISCARD, FOR ALL HIS GOOD QUALITIES, IS NOT A DECISIVE MAN OF ACTION. SINCE HIS ELECTION HE HAS POST-PONED MAKING THE TOUGH DECISIONS. NOW IT IS TOO LATE. GISCARD IS EXCELLENT ON TELEVISION, BUT IT IS THE EXCELLENCE OF AN ACTOR RATHER THAN A PRACTICAL POLITICIAN WHO UNDERSTANDS HIS CONSTITUENTS' NEEDS. GISCARD IS SO SKILLFUL ON TELEVISION THAT PEOPLE ARE READILY PERSUADED TO BELIEVE WHAT HE SAYS. SINCE HE HAS FAILED TO DELIVER ON HIS PROMISES, THE PUBLIC IS MORE DECEIVED THAN IT OTHERWISE WOULD BE. IN A SERSE HE IS THE VICTIM OF HIS PUBLIC SPEAKING ABILITY.

3. PRIME MINISTER BARRE. INDIRECTLY QUESTIONING GISCARD'S CHOICE OF BARRE AS PRIME MINISTER, DEFFERRE NOTED THAT GISCARD WILL HAVE DIFFICULTIES WITH THE RPR (GAULLIST MOVEMENT) AFTER HAVING RID HIS GOVERNMENT OF CHIRAC. THE GAULLISTS, DISCIPLINED UNDER DE GAULLE AND POMPIDOU, BEHAVED FAIRLY WELL UNDER GISCARD SO LONG AS ONE OF THEIR OWN WAS PRIME MINISTER. BUT BARRE IS NOT A CONFIDENTIAL

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GAULLIST; THEREFORE THE RPR FEELS NO COMPULSION TO OBEY HIM. BARRE MAY BE A GREAT ECONOMIST, BUT IT TAKES MORE THAN TECHNICAL EXPERTISE TO DIRECT FRANCE'S ECONOMY.

4. THE LEFT'S CHANCES. WHETHER THE BARRE PLAN SUCCEEDS OR NOT, DEFFERRE CONTINUED, THE LEFT'S CHANCES IN THE 1978 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS WILL BE THE SAME. GISCARD HAS PROMISED TOO MUCH WITHOUT DELIVERING, AND THE PUBLIC IS FED UP. THE LEFT HOPES BUT DOES NOT EXPECT THAT THE BARRE PLAN WILL BE SUCCESSFUL. IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR THE LEFT TO EXERCISE POWER IN 1978 IN THE MIDST OF A DETERIORATED ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL SITUATION.

5. EARLY ELECTIONS NOT LIKELY. IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTION AS TO THE LIKELIHOOD OF EARLY LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, DEFFERRE SAID THIS DEPENDS SOLELY ON GISCARD D'ESTAING. AFTER SOME DISCUSSION HE EXPANDED THIS

CONCEPT TO INCLUDE CHIRAC, BUT ADDED THAT HE DOES NOT
THINK IT IS IN CHIRAC'S INTEREST TO PROVOKE EARLY

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ELECTIONS. IF CHIRAC MAKES THIS MOVE AND THE MAJORITY
LOSES, HE WILL BE BLAMED PERSONALLY AND HIS CAREER WILL
BE STYMIED -- PERHAPS PERMANENTLY.

6. PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION. I ASKED DEFFERRE
WHETHER THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT IS LIKELY TO TRY TO
IMPLEMENT A SYSTEM OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION, AS
HAS RECENTLY BEEN RUMORED. UP TO NOW, DEFFERRE REPLIED,
THE PRESENT SYSTEM WITH ITS TWO ROUNDS HAS BEEN GENER-
ALLY FAVORABLE TO THE MAJORITY. NOW IT HAS GRADUALLY
BECOME MORE FAVORABLE TO THE LEFT. CONSEQUENTLY THE
MAJORITY IS LOOKING FOR WAYS TO ALTER THE SYSTEM IN ITS
FAVOR. THUS THE MAJORITY MIGHT ACCEPT A CHANGE IN THE
DIRECTION OF A SYSTEM OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION.
BUT EVEN THE MOST SHREWDLY CONCEIVED ELECTORAL ARRANGE-
MENTS OFTEN BACKFIRE ON THEIR INVENTORS. THE MAJORITY
MEMBERS MAY BELIEVE THAT THEY CAN ACHIEVE CONSIDERABLE
GAINS WITH PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION. BUT THIS IS
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BASED ON THE MISTAKEN NOTION THAT CHIRAC WILL BE ABLE TO FOLLOW IN DE GAULLE'S FOOTSTEPS AND GAIN A BROAD NATIONAL FOLLOWING FOR THE RPR.

7. WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A LEFT VICTORY. I ASKED DEFFERRE WHAT COULD BE EXPECTED IN THE CASE OF A LEFT VICTORY IN THE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. DEFFERRE REPLIED THAT THE LEFT WOULD NOT DEMAND THAT GISCARD STEP DOWN. THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF HAS SAID HE WOULD FINISH HIS TERM. BUT THE LEFT IS COMMITTED TO, AND CAN BE COUNTED ON TO IMPLEMENT, THE COMMON PROGRAM. THERE WILL BE AN EXPLOSION. (DEFFERRE DIGRESSED FOR A MOMENT AND SAID HOW CLEARLY HE RECALLED THE PUBLIC MANIFESTATIONS OF 1936.) THE CLIMATE WILL BE TRANSFORMED. GISCARD SIMPLY DOES NOT UNDERSTAND.

8. DEFFERRE'S CHANCES IN THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS. TO OUR COMMENT THAT DEFFERRE HIMSELF SEEMS A SURE WINNER IN THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, THE DEPUTY/MAYOR REPLIED: "NINETY PERCENT OF THE MARSEILLE PUBLIC BELIEVE I WILL WIN NEXT MARCH. THAT INCLUDES MANY WHO WILL NEVER VOTE FOR ME. BUT AN ELECTION IS NOT OVER UNTIL THE VOTES ARE COUNTED."

9. DEFFERRE'S NEW BOOK. DEFFERRE SHOWED US WITH SOME PRIDE THE JACKET COVER BEING DESIGNED FOR HIS NEW BOOK, "IF TOMORROW THE LEFT," WHICH HE SAID WILL BE PUBLISHED IN FEBRUARY.

10. COMMUNISTS IN GOVERNMENT. WE BRIEFLY TOUCHED ON THE ISSUE OF COMMUNISTS IN WESTERN EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS. I STRESSED THAT THE USG HAS WORKED CLOSELY AND WELL WITH NUMEROUS SOCIALIST GOVERNMENTS IN EUROPE. BUT COMMUNIST PARTICIPATION WOULD ADD A NEW DIMENSION, AND WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR THE AMERICAN PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND. DEFFERRE MERELY SHRUGGED AND REPLIED, "EVERYTHING EVOLVES

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IN LIFE."

11. ITALY AND THE PCI. AT ONE POINT DEFFERRE COMMENTED BRIEFLY ON ITALY AND THE PCI. TERMING ITALY A UNIQUE CASE, HE ASKED RHETORICALLY WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT THE PCI, WHILE STILL IN THE OPPOSITION, WOULD BE ADVOCATING RESTRAINTS ON SOCIAL ACTION AND ACQUIRING INCREAS-

INGLY AN IMAGE OF A LAW-AND-ORDER PARTY.

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12. REMARKS AT RECEPTION. FOLLOWING OUR PRIVATE TALK, WHICH LASTED FORTY MINUTES, DEFERRE MADE SOME REMARKS AT THE CIVIC RECEPTION. HE PARTICULARLY PRAISED THE FORD/CARTER TRANSITION, MARKED BY CLOSE AND INTIMATE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE INCOMING AND OUTGOING ADMINISTRATIONS, AS A LESSON FOR FRANCE AND AN EXAMPLE OF PRACTICAL DEMOCRACY IN ACTION. HE THEN CLEVERLY LINKED THIS TO HIS EXPECTATION OF A LEFT VICTORY, EXPRESSING THE HOPE THAT WHEN THE TIME COMES, AN EQUALY SMOOTH AND COOPERATIVE TRANSITION CAN TAKE PLACE IN FRANCE. THEN HE underscored that a change of government in France would mean no change in French friendship and cooperation with the US.

13. IN MY RESPONSE I AVOIDED ANY DIRECT MENTION OF THE COMMUNISTS IN GOVERNMENT ISSUE, STRESSING INSTEAD THE NEED FOR IMPROVED RELATIONS BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES.

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I SAID THAT WE WANTED A FRANCE WHICH IS INDEPENDENT IN EVERY WAY. AT THE SAME TIME, WE ARE MORE THAN EVER AWARE OF OUR INTERDEPENDENCE IN ECONOMIC AND SECURITY AREAS. I EMPHASIZED THAT WE HAVE NO INTENTION OF INTERFERING IN FRENCH INTERNAL AFFAIRS. THIS WOULD BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE, I SAID, JUST AS IT WOULD BE IF THE FRENCH WERE TO INTERFERE IN OUR INTERNAL AFFAIRS.

14. COMMENT. DEFFERRE WAS A MOST CORDIAL HOST AND COULD NOT HAVE BEEN MORE FRIENDLY. THERE WAS NO SIGN AT ALL OF THE ERRATIC BEHAVIOR FOR WHICH HE IS SAID TO BE NOTED. ON THE CONTRARY, HE WAS COMPLETELY IN CONTROL OF HIMSELF AND PUT FORTH HIS LEFT VIEWS WITH POLISH AND CONVICTION. HE HAD OBVIOUSLY GIVEN CONSIDERABLE FORE-THOUGHT TO OUR MEETING, AND HAD PREPARED HIS REMARKS FOR THE RECEPTION--WHICH INCLUDED A FLATTERING ACCOUNT OF MY BIOGRAPHY--WITH SOME CARE. I BELIEVE OUR MEETING SUCCEEDED IN SMOOTHING OVER ANY MISUNDERSTANDINGS WHICH MAY HAVE RESULTED FROM THE POSTPONEMENTS OF MY EARLIER VISITS.

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